



STATE OF NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

FATALITY ASSESSMENT AND CONTROL EVALUATION

Newspaper Carrier Killed in a Two-car Head-on Collision Case Report 07NY092

SUMMARY

In September 2007, a 59 year-old newspaper carrier (the victim) was killed in a head-on collision with a car driven by a deputy sheriff. The incident occurred on a two-lane highway that ran primarily north and south. The highway crests near the area of the collision: there is a moderate uphill in both the north and south directions. The collision occurred just north of the crest. At the time of the incident, the victim was traveling south in her car in the northbound lane placing newspapers in the curbside mailboxes along the east side of the highway. The deputy sheriff was on his evening shift patrolling the same area. At 2:28 A.M., the deputy sheriff was dispatched to respond to an emergency call. The deputy sheriff started driving north on the same highway towards the crest with his emergency lights activated. Meanwhile the victim was approaching the crest heading south in the northbound lane. Because of the obstruction of the hill and the vehicle speeds, neither the deputy sheriff nor the victim had sufficient time to react to avoid the collision. The victim's car was straddling the northbound fog line when it collided with the police car just north of the crest. The victim was not wearing a seat belt and was pronounced dead at the scene. The deputy sheriff was wearing his seat belt during the collision; he was treated for minor cuts and bruises.

New York State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (NY FACE) investigators concluded that to help prevent similar incidents from occurring, employers should:

- **instruct newspaper delivery personnel not to drive on the wrong side of roadways while delivering newspapers;**
- **instruct newspaper carriers to use their seat belts whenever the vehicles are in motion;**
- **require newspaper carriers to use high-visibility strobe lights on their delivery vehicles;**
- **evaluate delivery routes, assess the hazards and develop a comprehensive delivery safety program;**
- **provide delivery safety training to all newspaper carriers;**
- **consider using right-hand drive cars for delivering newspapers; and**
- **promote customers' understanding of the delivery hazards so that they would be more receptive to alternative paper delivery methods.**

(Many newspaper agencies have their papers delivered by independent contractors. The preventive measures and recommendations proposed in this report also apply to independent contractors.)

INTRODUCTION

In September 2007, a 59 year-old female newspaper carrier (the victim) was killed when her car collided with a car driven by a county deputy sheriff. At the time of the incident, the victim was driving

on the wrong side of a two-lane local highway delivering newspapers. New York State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (NY FACE) staff learned of the incident from newspaper articles. The New York State Police investigated the incident. NY FACE developed this report based on the information collected through reviewing the police incident report, the police collision reconstruction report and the death certificate completed by the coroner.

INVESTIGATION

The incident occurred on a two-lane local highway that ran primarily north and south. The north and southbound lanes of the highway in the vicinity of the collision are separated by a double solid yellow line indicating that passing is not allowed in either direction. The widths of the northbound and southbound lanes are approximately 9 feet 5 inches (9'5") and 9'7" respectively. Both shoulders are comprised of asphalt and are separated from the driving lanes by a solid white roadway edge (fog) line. The widths of the east and west shoulders are approximately 1'4" and 6" respectively.

There are residences and trees along both sides of the highway. The New York State speed limit for this section of the highway is 55 miles per hour. The highway crests near the area of the collision: there is a moderate uphill in both the north and south directions. The collision occurred just north of the crest.

At the time of the incident, the victim was traveling south in her car on the northbound lane placing newspapers in the curbside mailboxes along the east side of the highway. The deputy sheriff was on his evening shift patrolling the area. At 2:28 A.M., the deputy sheriff was dispatched to respond to an emergency call. He was driving north on the same highway with his emergency lights activated.

The incident occurred at approximately 2:36 A.M. The State Police Collision Reconstruction Unit calculated that the deputy Sheriff was traveling at a speed between 65 and 75 miles per hour (mph) heading north towards the crest. The victim was approaching the hill heading south in the northbound lane at a calculated speed between 10 and 30 mph. The victim's car did not have a flashing warning light. The victim's car was straddling the northbound fog line when it came into the deputy sheriff's view as he reached the top of the hill. The deputy sheriff tried to swerve away from the victim's car, but was unable to. The two cars collided just north of the crest (Figure 1).

The impact of the collision pushed the victim's car backward as the police car continued traveling north. The police car separated from the victim's car and traveled in a northwest direction across the highway center-line and southbound lane to a location off the west shoulder. The victim's car continued to travel in a northerly direction to the east shoulder where it landed on its roof.

The victim's car was a 1995 model four-door sedan equipped with driver and passenger air bags. Both air bags deployed during the incident. The seat belt was fully retracted. The State Police Reconstruction Unit determined that it was unlikely that the victim was wearing her seat belt during the collision. The victim was pronounced dead at the scene. The direct cause of death was multiple blunt force injuries. The car driven by the deputy sheriff was a 2006 model four-door sedan. The driver side air bag deployed during the collision. The deputy sheriff, who was wearing the seat belt during collision, was treated for minor cuts and bruises.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: *Newspaper agencies should instruct their newspaper delivery personnel not to drive on the wrong side of roadways while delivering newspapers.*

Discussion: Newspaper carriers in the U.S. drive left-hand-drive (LHD) vehicles and mailboxes are on the curbside to the right side of the vehicle. In order to deposit the newspaper in the mailbox, the carrier has to park, undo the seat belt, slide over the front seat that is usually piled with newspapers, stretch to reach the mailbox to deposit the newspaper. The carrier then has to slide back to the driver's seat, buckle up, drive a few feet and do it all over again. A common practice among newspaper carriers is to drive on the wrong side of roadway so that they can deposit the papers in the mailboxes without having to go through all of these inconveniences.

NY FACE identified five fatal head-on collisions between 2003 and 2007 involving newspaper carriers in upstate New York resulting in five newspaper carrier deaths. Three (60%) of the head-on crashes were caused by carriers driving on the wrong side of the road. Newspaper agencies should warn their delivery personnel of the danger of driving on the wrong side of road. Many newspapers are delivered in the early morning between 2:00 to 5:30 A.M. Newspaper carriers may take chances such as driving on the wrong side of the road because the traffic is light in the early morning hours. However, light traffic does not equal driver safety. The risk of a car accident is high during those hours because people tend to drive faster and engage in risky behaviors including drunken driving. Neither delivery employees nor independent contractors should ever drive on the wrong side of road under any circumstances.

Recommendations #2: *Newspaper carriers should use seat belts whenever the vehicles are in motion.*

Discussion: Seat belts save lives and help prevent serious injuries in a traffic crash. Newspaper carriers should strictly follow and obey the New York State's occupant restraint law and use seat belts whenever their vehicles are in motion.

Recommendation #3: *Newspaper agencies should require their newspaper carriers to use high-visibility strobe lights on their delivery vehicles.*

Discussion: Many carriers deliver newspapers on poorly-lit suburban residential streets and along rural two-lane roadways with narrow or no shoulders. They deliver papers in the dark or twilight and in all weather conditions. The delivery vehicles travel below the speed limit and make frequent stops during delivery. Other drivers on the road may not have enough time to stop (inadequate *stopping sight distance*) or to avoid collision (inadequate *decision sight distance*) due to the poor visibility, hazardous road conditions and traveling speeds. Newspaper carriers should equip their vehicles with high-visibility strobe lights that can be seen from all directions. The strobe lights can increase the delivery vehicles' visibility and increase both stopping sight distance and decision sight distance for other drivers so that they can have more time to maneuver their vehicles to avoid collisions.

Recommendation #4: *Newspaper agencies should evaluate all delivery routes, assess the hazards and develop a comprehensive delivery safety program.*

Discussion: Transportation accidents remain the leading cause of occupational fatal injuries in the U.S. Newspaper carriers are exposed to traffic hazards on a daily basis. Newspaper agencies and independent delivery contractors should identify and assess all risks that delivery personnel might encounter and develop a comprehensive delivery safety program for injury prevention and worker protection. Delivery routes should be selected and designed so that the carriers can avoid busy roads, junctions and crossings, sharp turns, and poorly-lit areas. Employers and independent contractors should review the delivery routes frequently and update them based on the changes in road conditions

and address the new hazards associated with the changes. Newspaper delivery personnel should be instructed not to take short cuts to vary their delivery route, whenever possible.

Recommendations #5: *Newspaper agencies and independent contractors should provide delivery safety training to all newspaper carriers.*

Discussion: Delivery safety training including the defensive driving course offered by National Safety Council should be provided to all newspaper delivery personnel annually. The newspaper agencies should review their delivery safety programs with the carriers. The following topics should be included in the training:

- 1) use safety belts whenever the vehicle is in motion;
- 2) use high-visibility strobe lights during delivery;
- 3) strictly follow traffic rules and never drive on the wrong side of road;
- 4) take proper precautions when driving in hazardous conditions and inclement weather such as fog, rain, snow, or icy roads; and
- 5) maintain delivery vehicles and ensure that all the safety features including air bags, seat belts and brakes are in operable condition.

Recommendation #6: *Newspaper carriers may consider using right-hand drive cars for delivering newspapers.*

Discussion: Some US Post Office carriers use right-hand-drive (RHD) cars tailored to curbside mail delivery. Drivers can drive up next to the curbside mailboxes to deposit mail without having to get out of their vehicles or remove their seat belts. They can also get out of the vehicle directly onto the pavement without having to walk around their vehicles. Newspaper carriers may consider using RHD cars. Carriers should go through proper training and practice before operating RHD cars.

Recommendation #7: *Newspaper agencies should promote customer understanding of the delivery hazards so that they would be more receptive to alternative paper delivery methods.*

Discussion: Newspaper agencies should work with customers to promote understanding of the delivery hazards so that the customers would be more receptive to alternative paper delivery methods such as tossing papers on lawns or drive ways. Tossing papers on lawns or drive ways does not require a driver to reach, straddle or get out of the vehicle as is required for depositing papers in curbside mailboxes from a left-hand drive vehicle.

Keywords: *newspaper carrier, traffic accident, drive on wrong-side of road, head-on collision.*

REFERENCES

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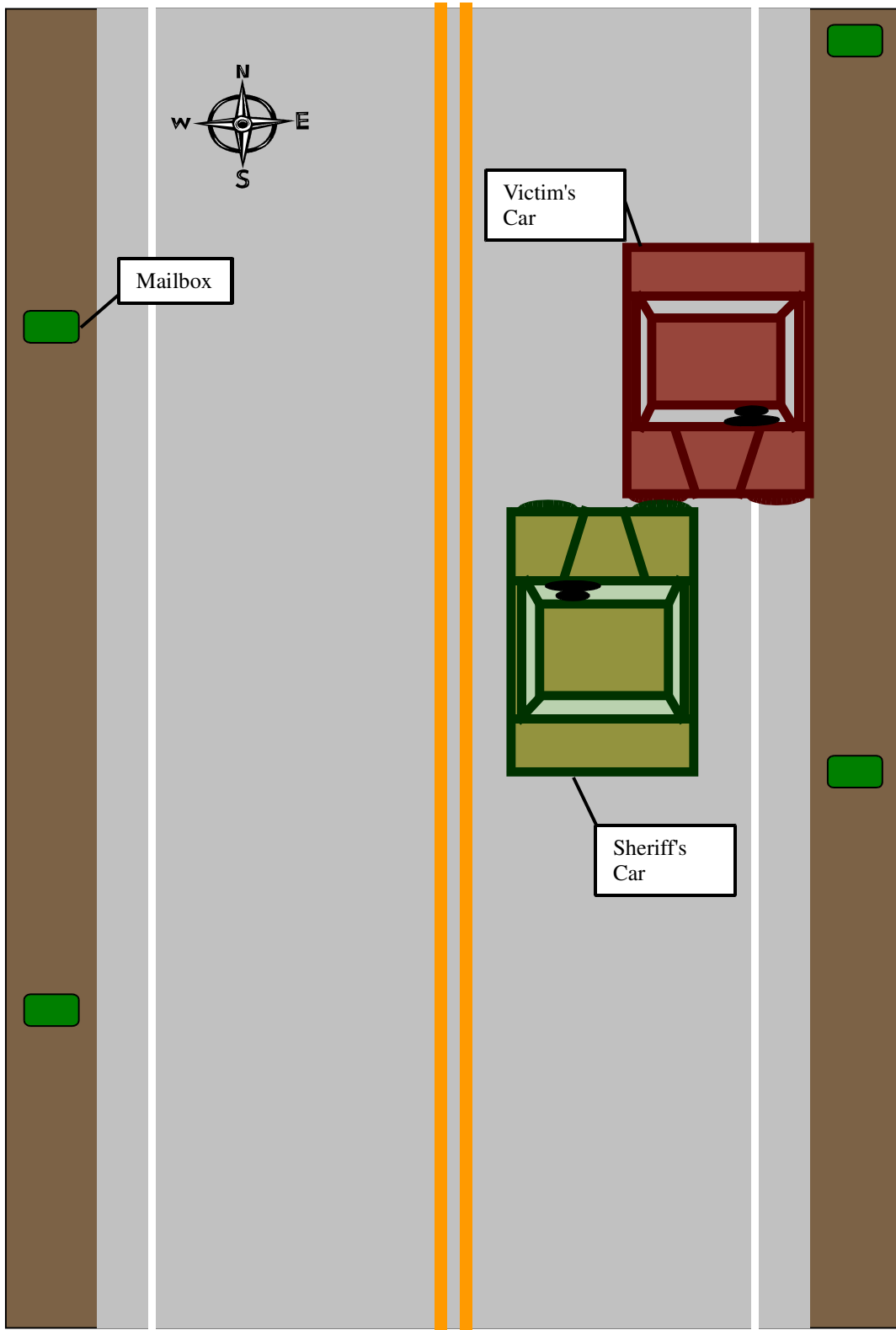


Figure 1. The location of the two cars at the time of the collision: the victim was heading south in the northbound lane delivering papers and the sheriff was traveling north responding to an emergency call.

The New York State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (NY FACE) program is one of many workplace health and safety programs administered by the New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH). It is a research program designed to identify and study fatal occupational injuries. Under a cooperative agreement with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the NY FACE collects information on occupational fatalities in New York State (excluding New York City) and targets specific types of fatalities for evaluation. NY FACE investigators evaluate information from multiple sources. Findings are summarized in narrative reports that include recommendations for preventing similar events in the future. [These recommendations are distributed to employers, workers, and other organizations interested in promoting workplace safety.](#) The NY FACE does not determine fault or legal liability associated with a fatal incident. Specific identifiers, such as names of employers and witnesses, are not included in written investigative reports or other databases to protect the confidentiality of those who voluntarily participate in the program.

Additional information regarding the NY FACE program can be obtained from:

New York State Department of Health FACE Program
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www.nyhealth.gov/nysdoh/face/face.htm